Prestel Briefing

MAILBOX LAUNCHED AS A NATIONAL SERVICE

Mailbox, Prestel's electronic mail service, is now within local call access of 96 percent of Britain's telephone population. Originally launched in September 1981 in London, the recent expansion of the service makes this versatile method of communication available to users throughout the country. Messages can be sent instantaneously between any of the 47,000 Prestel terminals, and there are no transmission or collection charges.

How Mailbox works

Every Prestel customer has a message mailbox, like an electronic pigeonhole, and each mailbox has a number, that acts as an address. There's an alphabetical directory of customers, updated every week, and an ever-growing number of specialist listings, bulletin boards and personal advertisement sections that quote "mailbox numbers" as the contact point. The procedure for sending messages takes five minutes to master, as Steven Rogers, Prestel's Mailbox Manager, explains: "You just call up Prestel in the usual way, choose a message page from the Mailbox index, enter the recipient's mailbox number and any message, and send the page off. Within a second or two, it's securely stored by Prestel in the addressee's mailbox. They're informed of messages waiting the next time they begin or finish a call to Prestel. Any number of messages can be left waiting for you indefinitely, and after you've looked at them, you can store up to five at a time for as long as you want. There are over 400 message page designs to choose from, ranging from formal business memo layouts to ready-made standard messages (such as invitations, good wishes and general greetings) and electronic birthday cards, valentines...." More than half Prestel's subscribers are already equipped with typewriter-like alphanumeric keyboards, while many of the standard message pages (such as "Phone me on...") and all the greetings cards can be filled in with numbers alone.

The benefits of Mailbox

Mailbox offers a host of advantages over conventional methods of communication. A Mailbox message can be sent in a fraction of the time it takes to post a letter or make repeated telephone calls, and using Prestel costs only a few pence per minute during office hours. Mailbox is mobile: light, hand-carried viewdata sets can be used during trips away from the office or home, or the recipient can collect messages from other terminals (using a confidential password). And Mailbox is convenient: users read their messages when they're ready for them, and the problems of trying to catch someone at the other end of the telephone are eliminated.

Mailbox applications

The applications of Mailbox, both at work and in the home, are expanding rapidly, as more and more Prestel customers appreciate and exploit its advantages. Over 20,000 messages are sent on average each week, carrying routine office-to-office correspondence, confirming telephone conversations, acknowledging orders for goods, and confirming bookings in the travel and entertainment trades.

Mailbox also helps company headquarters, branch offices and field salesmen keep in touch and respond quickly to sales leads. At the same time dealers and distributors can be kept informed of stock enquiries and transfers. For these types of application Prestel offers a message page customisation service – your business form or letter-head turned into its electronic equivalent for a small annual fee.

In this issue

Inside – More Prestel products plus facts + figures.

Back page – Prestel's growth

WHAT IS PRESTEL?

Prestel, British Telecommunications' public viewdata service, links adapted television screens to computers through ordinary telephone lines so information and two-way services can be delivered directly into offices and homes.

Information on Prestel can be updated by the minute and is available 24 hours a day.

In addition, by using 'Gateways' private computers can be linked to Prestel sets via Prestel computers. This facility makes possible services such as home banking, home shopping and for travel agents' confirmed reservations of airline tickets.

Because the system is two-way, all customers can send messages, make bookings or request information at the touch of a button. There are well over 300,000 frames (or 'pages') of information available ranging from the general – for example, train time-tables, news and weather, games, sports results, recipes – to the more specialised. Some of the specialist services Prestel offers are Homelink, CitiService, messaging, Private Prestel and Prestel Microcomputing.

PRIVATE PRESTEL

By means of a CUG (closed user group) Prestel can be used in effect as a private viewdata service, with access restricted to specified users.

One application of this is Private Prestel, which enables any business or organisation to communicate confidentially, cheaply and quickly to nominated users.

Uses include sales force management and communications both in-house and for major customers and agents.

HOMELINK

A unique partnership between a building society and a major clearing bank in the intensely competitive UK personal savings and banking sector has given birth to the world's first commercial viewdata banking service – Homelink. The Nottingham Building Society, Bank of Scotland and Prestel launched in September last year a service whereby customers can carry out an impressive range of banking transactions – 24 hours a day.

Through Prestel, a user can check his bank and building society accounts, transfer money between them, pay bills, request statements, apply for a loan, order cheque books, reserve holidays, take part in competitions and shop for a variety of goods – all from the comfort of home.

FACTS

Number of terminals attached to the Prestel network. 47,000
(The term terminals includes integrated viewdata sets, adaptors, microcomputers, office work-stations, word processors etc.....)

Proportion of terminals in businesses 59%

Proportion of terminals in homes 41%

Number of contracted information providers (IPs) 160

Number of information sources 1200+
(This figure includes both contracted IPs and Sub-IPs)

Number of frames available for access* 329,000
(This figure includes frames on open access and frames within CUGs – Closed User Groups)

CITISERVICE

Prestel CitiService provides up-to-the - minute information from the world's financial centres for investment advisors, commodity traders and financial decision makers.

It provides its customers with continuously updated stock market and commodity prices, foreign exchange and interest rates, unit trust prices and business and financial news and analysis.

Launched in spring 1983, CitiService is a joint venture between Prestel and ICV Information Systems. The latest development has been the introduction of a London Stock Exchange prices service, through a gateway, which provides the user with a continuous update facility.

For further information contact: Jan Shearer, Prestel, British Telecommunications

†Average number of frame accesses in month*	**17.1 million**
Messaging:	
†Average number of messages sent via Prestel in month* *(of which 106,000 were response frames – user to IP & 86,000 were mailbox messages – user to user IP to user)*	**192,000**
Number of operational gateways to external computers	**18**
Proportion of U.K. telephone population within local call rate area	**96%**

†Average for July, August & September 1984
**These figures do not include activity conducted with external computers through Prestel Gateways*

PRESTEL FARMLINK

Prestel Farmlink is a comprehensive farm management service designed to help farmers make the most of their own experience and judgement, cutting down on time spent looking up and telephoning round for information.

The information is localised but also has national aspects, giving for example the latest news on crop problems, weather, market, market prices and pest warnings.

Through 'Gateways' the Farmlink customer can perform wages and ration formulation analysis calculations using nothing more than a basic viewdata set. Full user to user messaging is also offered.

MICROCOMPUTING

Prestel Microcomputing offers the rapidly expanding number of home computer users a vast library of software and information through Prestel.

Games, educational and other programs – both free and for sale from top software houses – can be automatically taken off the Prestel services and 'downloaded' directly into a micro from the telephone network.

Pages of lively comment, software, hardware reviews, letters, and up-to-date microcomputer news are available. Users can also communicate with each other. Prestel Microcomputing includes Micronet 800 and Viewfax 258, both of which are amongst the most popular Prestel information providers, Micronet 800 in fact being the No.1 in terms of frame accesses.

PRESTEL CHARGES

Standing charge: All Prestel customers pay a quarterly standing charge – this is £16.50 per quarter for a business customer and £5 per quarter for a residential customer.

Time charge: This charge applies only when a connection to Prestel is made during a standard rate period. At all other times this charge does not apply.

The standard periods and charges are:

8 am – 6 pm Monday-Friday	5p per minute
8 am – 1 pm Saturday	5p per minute
All other times	Free

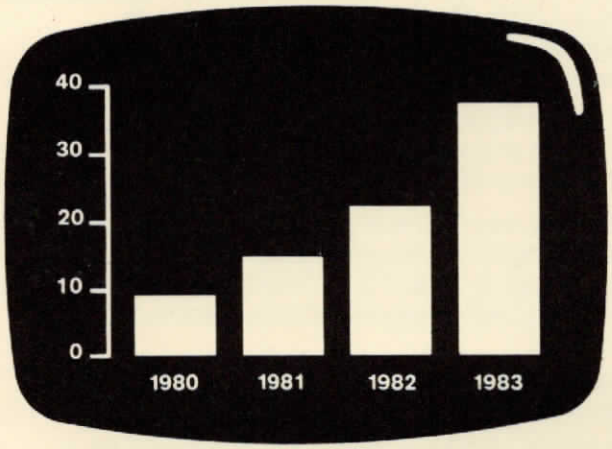
Page charge: Some pages (generally the most frequently updated) carry a viewing charge. This is set by the Information Provider of the page selected and the amount payable appears on the top line of the page. The vast majority of pages, however, carry no charge.

Telephone charges: While connected to Prestel you pay for the telephone call to the Prestel computer you are using. The majority of customers can now receive Prestel at local call rates. It may be necessary to install a socket for connection to Prestel.

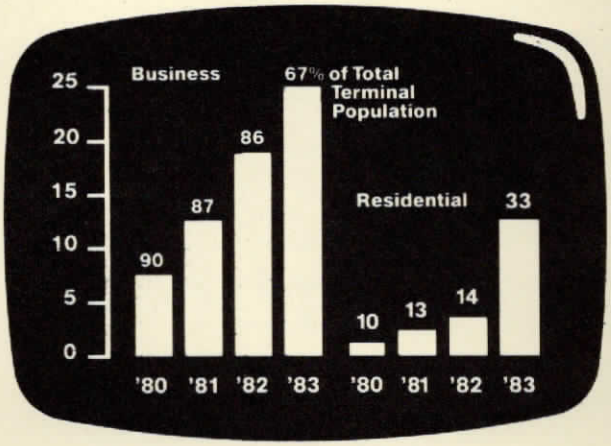
Billing
All Prestel charges are billed quarterly and separately from your normal telephone bill. However, telephone charges incurred while using Prestel will be included on the telephone bill.

Special tariffs
Certain Prestel services such as Prestel Microcomputing and CitiService have special tariffs.

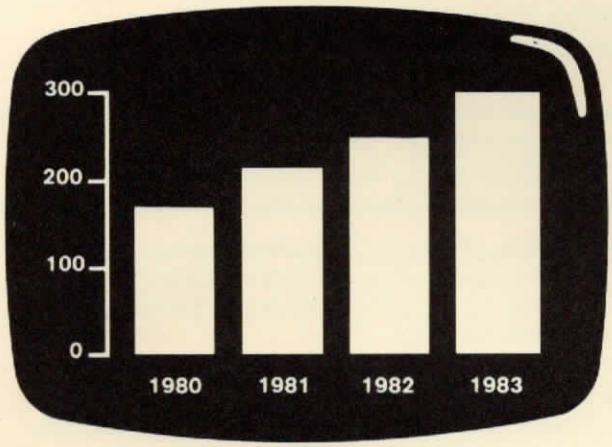
PRESTEL'S GROWTH



Terminals attached to the Prestel network 1980-1983 (Thousands)

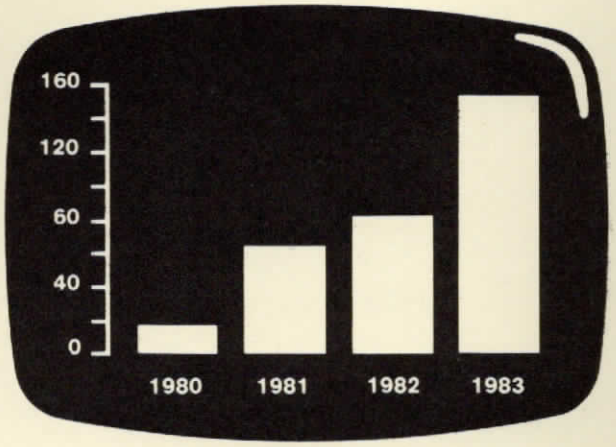


Terminal analysis 1980-83 (Thousands)



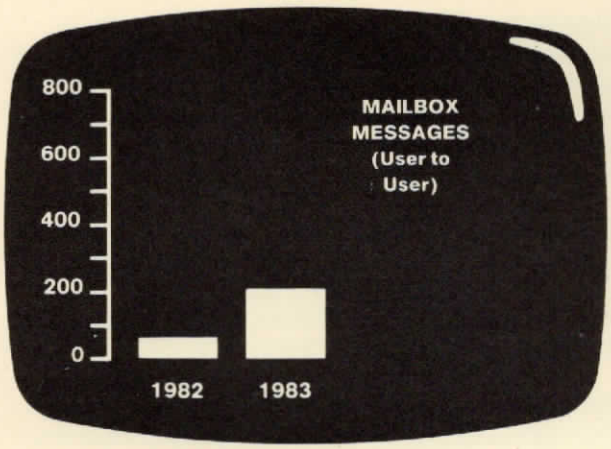
Frames in use 1980-1983 (Thousands)

At the end of 1983 in addition to those frames available from Prestel computers there were 14 gateways to third party computers in operations



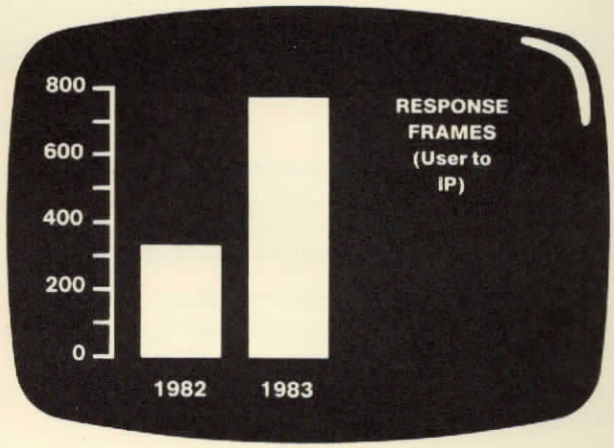
Frame accesses 1980-83 (Millions)

PRESTEL FRAME ACCESSES ONLY
(Gateway frame accesses are not included)



Interactivity 1982-83 (Thousands of Messages)

Gateway transactions are not included



Interactivity 1982-83 (Thousands of Messages)

Gateway transactions are not included

Prestel Briefing is Published by Prestel Customer and Public Relations, British Telecommunications plc, Telephone House, Temple Avenue, London EC4Y 0HL
Telephone 01 · 583 9811

1984

British Telecommunications plc
Registered Office 81 Newgate Street
London EC1A 7AJ
Registered in England no. 1800000.

Prestel and the Prestel symbol are registered trademarks of British Telecommunications plc